United Nations S/PV.6190

Security Council

Sixty-fourth year

Provisional

6190th meeting

Thursday, 17 September 2009, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Ms. Rice	(United States of America)
	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. La Yifan
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Vilović
	France	Mr. Araud
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Shalgham
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Turkey	Mr. Apakan
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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09-51668 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Serry to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Robert Serry, to whom I now give the floor.

Mr. Serry: Before I brief the Council on developments in the Middle East over the past month, allow me to share a personal experience.

Last week, I attended the Palestine-Jordan soccer match in Hebron, in the company of the Palestinian Prime Minister, the Governor of Hebron and the Mayor of the city. Despite all the problems of the unresolved conflict and occupation, which are on painful display in parts of Hebron, so much of what I witnessed there that evening filled me with hope. The Palestinian security forces provided exemplary public security. The Palestinian flag flew proudly. The Palestinian people, in their thousands, cheered the home side to an honourable draw with their neighbour, Jordan, whose very presence was symbolically powerful.

Today we have a Palestinian Authority that is more than a partner for peace. We have a player ready to meet its responsibilities, determined to insist on its rights and desperately in need of support and enablement — from Israel, from the region and from the world. The Palestinian Government is resolved to complete preparations for statehood in less than two years. I am convinced that they can do it, if indeed they have not already. In a few short years from now, any one of our national teams could play soccer against Palestine, not in area A of the Palestinian Authority but in a contiguous State of Palestine that is a full and sovereign State Member of the United Nations living side by side with the State of Israel in peace.

We all know that there are obstacles to this goal, and they can at times seem overwhelming. But it can be achieved, and it simply must be. The failure to do so, I believe, would deepen the conflict to a point from which it will be very difficult to recover, with profound and lasting consequences.

That is why the current moment is so important, and why all parties must cease finding excuses and rise to their responsibilities. United States Special Envoy George Mitchell is in the region as part of continuing efforts towards the early resumption and conclusion of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Those efforts are at a critical stage and have our strong support.

We take this opportunity to remind the Council of the commitments made to the Quartet by the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in November 2008, which formed the basis of Security Council resolution 1850 (2008). We believe that any resumed negotiations should build on that work, that robust third-party support will be helpful to the parties and that the end goal of a two-State solution based on the 1967 lines and the resolution of all core issues can, and must, emerge quickly and meaningfully.

But for negotiations to be enabled, it is critical that the parties commit to, and implement, their Road Map obligations. In that regard, continued Israeli settlement activity remains a source of deep concern. In addition to ongoing construction, on 7 September, Israeli Defence Minister Barak authorized the construction of a further 455 housing units in several settlements in the West Bank, including around Jerusalem and in the Jordan Valley. Moreover, on 8 September, the Israel Lands Administration accepted bids for the construction of 486 apartments in the settlement of Pisgat Ze'ev, in East Jerusalem.

The Secretary-General issued a statement on 9 September stressing the illegality of settlement activity and calling on Israel to implement its obligations under the Road Map to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, and to dismantle

outposts erected since March 2001, as called for by the Quartet. We also reiterate the Quartet's call for the cessation of provocative actions in Jerusalem, including demolitions and evictions.

Members of the Council will recall the Quartet's support for dialogue among all States in the region in the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative. We hope that countries in the region stand ready to take positive steps towards Israel if indeed negotiations resume based on the implementation of Road Map obligations. We also strongly re-emphasize the importance of fostering peaceful coexistence throughout the region through the conclusion of peace agreements between Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon on the basis of Security Council resolutions, in a manner that is mutually reinforcing of efforts to establish the State of Palestine. In addition, we would urge intensified support to the Palestinian Authority as a point of common regional action.

As I indicated in my introduction, on 25 August the Palestinian Authority announced its agenda to complete, within the coming two years, the building of institutions of a State apparatus in order to form the basis for the creation of an internationally recognized Palestinian State. That agenda of self-empowerment, which is reflected in concrete security and economic improvements on the ground and more ambitious plans for the period ahead, will be a powerful complement to a renewed political process. It must be enabled and supported. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting to be held here in New York on 22 September will be an opportunity for renewed commitment in that regard.

During the reporting period, the Palestinian Authority continued to ensure law and order in West Bank cities and towns. The trend of reduced Israeli military operations evident since June 2009 continued. However, between 20 August and 15 September, 50 Palestinians were injured and three were killed in actions by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in the West Bank, among them a 15 year-old boy. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recorded 35 settler attacks on Palestinians, some of which occurred in the context of the so-called price-tag policy, whereby settlers attack Palestinian communities to resist any attempts to remove settlement outposts.

Overall, OCHA reports that 619 obstacles to movement remain in place in the West Bank, including 69 permanently staffed checkpoints. However, Israeli Government steps to ease closure measures reported in recent briefings have resulted in a qualitative improvement in movement and access. During the reporting period, Israel eased the operation of a checkpoint, which should improve access to the Jordan Valley. Yesterday, Israel announced that it would begin the removal of 100 earth mounds in several West Bank cities. United Nations staff have witnessed actions being taken in that regard, although most of those obstacles are not included in the official United Nations count.

We strongly encourage the Government of Israel to build on those positive steps with more far-reaching measures consistent with its policy of facilitating increased movement and economic activity. In that context, we remain concerned that Israel has not approved the minimum required frequency for the Wataniya mobile telephone operator, which would allow commercial viability. That is essential for the Palestinian economy and for PA revenues.

The Palestinian Authority has continued its reform and fiscal stimulus efforts. The economy grew by 5.4 per cent in the second quarter of 2009 as compared with the same period in 2008. However, shortfalls persist in meeting recurrent budgetary needs. Timely donor support is vital in order to maintain the liquidity of the Palestinian Authority, to help it avoid borrowing from domestic banks and to enable it to sustain its reform agenda.

There have also been important political steps on the Palestinian side under the leadership of President Abbas. On 26 August, the Palestinian National Council — the PLO's legislative body — met in Ramallah. It was the first such meeting since 1988. Six new members were elected to the PLO Executive Committee.

President Abbas has indicated his intention, in accordance with Palestinian law, to decree that presidential and legislative elections be held in the West Bank and Gaza upon the expiry of the term of the current Palestinian Legislative Council, in January 2010. Hamas has, however, stated that it will not permit the holding of elections in Gaza before an agreement on national unity is reached.

On 10 September, building on seven rounds of dialogue since the early months of this year, Egypt presented a comprehensive proposal to resolve the outstanding issues dividing the Palestinians, based on the holding of elections in the first half of 2010. We

reiterate our call for the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank, as called for by the Quartet, and urge all factions to engage positively in internal dialogue under Egyptian auspices.

The situation in Gaza remains unsustainable and not in the interests of anyone concerned. Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) contains the elements of a more strategic approach, but key elements remain unfulfilled. As efforts are made to relaunch a meaningful political process, the situation in Gaza cannot be left to further deteriorate and unravel.

There is an uneasy informal calm, but it is inherently fragile, and violent incidents continue. During the reporting period, two rockets and 11 mortars were fired from Gaza and there were 18 IDF shallow incursions and three air strikes, as well as several incidents in which the IDF opened fire on Palestinian fishermen. Six Palestinians were killed — two of them children — and 16 injured, while one IDF soldier was injured by a mortar. We continue to call for an end to violence and for full respect for international law by all parties.

We note with grave concern that, according to a statement by Hamas leader Khaled Mashal on 10 September, Hamas continues to buy and manufacture weapons and to smuggle them into Gaza. Extreme radical groups are also active in Gaza. Hamas reportedly arrested some 160 supporters of the radical group Jund Ansar Allah in the last days of August, after explosives had been laid near a key Hamas security installation; some have recently been released.

Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit remains in captivity after almost 39 months. We continue to call for access to be granted to him, as well as for his release. Discussions are continuing with a view to securing his release and that of a number of the nearly 10,000 Palestinians currently in detention in Israel.

Owing to Israel's blockade, no Palestinian exports were permitted during the reporting period and there has been no significant improvement in the inadequate levels of access reported in previous briefings. Food and medical supplies make up the bulk of imports. As stressed in a recent report of the Humanitarian Coordinator, immediate humanitarian needs include agricultural inputs, water and sanitation equipment, material for shelter repair and educational material. The urgent entry of those items must be facilitated by the Israeli authorities. The longer-term consequences of the blockade are deeply worrying in terms of deteriorating public infrastructure, environmental degradation, the destruction of livelihoods and the incubation of despair and frustration among a population half of which is made up of children.

As the Council is aware, in early June the Secretary-General presented Israel with a proposal for United Nations-led civilian reconstruction activities in Gaza, beginning with suspended projects comprising housing, medical clinics and schools. The proposal is fully supported by the Palestinian Authority and the Quartet. I have had extensive and constructive high-level discussions with the Israeli Government on the proposal. A United Nations working-level negotiating team, comprising the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, has had constant and positive dialogue with Israeli officials on the technical details, including United Nations monitoring and verification procedures. The United Nations has left no reasonable stone unturned in this matter.

However, I must inform the Council that we have not received a positive response from Israel. That is deeply regrettable. The Government cites the continued detention of Gilad Shalit as the key obstacle to allowing even limited civilian reconstruction. I reiterate our appeal to the Government of Israel to allow without delay the entry of material into Gaza in order to make a meaningful start in addressing the massive civilian recovery needs.

More positively, Israel has announced the approval of three United Nations water and sanitation projects, drawn from a list proposed to the previous Israeli Government some 15 months ago by the Secretary-General. As highlighted in a recent report of the United Nations Environment Programme, underground water supplies in Gaza — upon which 1.5 million Palestinians depend for agriculture and drinking water — are in danger of collapse. Some 80 million litres of untreated and partially treated sewage are discharged into the sea daily, with potentially grave public health and environmental consequences for Gaza, southern Israel and Egypt. The approvals given for the three United Nations projects, as well as that given to the World Bank for work on a sewage project in northern Gaza, can be only a beginning. A

considerable scaling-up will be required if urgent water and sanitation needs are to be met.

Finally, the report of the fact-finding mission on the Gaza conflict, mandated by the Human Rights Council and headed by Justice Richard Goldstone, was released on 15 September. The mission was tasked to

> "investigate all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law that might have been committed at any time in the context of the military operations that were conducted in Gaza during the period from 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, whether before, during or after".

The report will be formally presented to the Human Rights Council on 29 September.

I now turn briefly to Lebanon. Three months after the 7 June parliamentary elections, efforts to form a Government reached a new standstill on 10 September, when Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri stepped down after the opposition had rejected his Cabinet proposal. On 14 and 15 September, President Sleiman conducted a new round of consultations with all parliamentary blocs. As a result of those consultations, he reappointed Mr. Hariri as Prime Minister-designate and tasked him with forming a Government. The Secretary-General hopes that the Lebanese will continue working towards the goal of a unity Cabinet. Allow me to add that it is important to form a Government speedily in order to ensure that the gains towards stability in Lebanon achieved through the elections are not eroded by a prolongation of the current political stalemate.

With regard to southern Lebanon, on 11 September two rockets were launched against Israel from the area of Al-Qulaylah. Israel retaliated by firing 12 artillery shells. The firing of the rockets constituted a clear violation of resolution 1701 (2006). The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the Lebanese Armed Forces have intensified joint operational activities. On 11 September, UNIFIL shared with the parties the report on the investigation into the Khirbat Salim incident. Israeli air violations continued on a daily basis.

I am in close touch with my Quartet colleagues regarding the efforts to create conditions for resumed negotiations and to secure the commitments required under the Road Map; the important State-building efforts of the Palestinian Authority; the unsustainable situation in Gaza, including the efforts of the United Nations to begin civilian reconstruction; and the broader regional dimensions. There is unity of purpose on all those issues, as well as a determination to focus all political energies on conflict resolution in the crucial few years ahead. There is an important opportunity to lay the basis for progress as leaders gather for the general debate of the General Assembly next week, and Quartet principals will meet on 24 September. Above all, the parties must take responsibility and seize this opportunity. Now is the time to make the commitments necessary to relaunch negotiations and to see them through to a two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

The President: I thank Mr. Serry for his briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.